

# THE STUDENT VOICE



**Photo submitted. New Student Council makes a difference at L.V. Rogers Secondary School, Nelson BC.**

## Article by Jack Steer of Nelson, age 17

"I cannot say whether things will get better if we change; what I can say is they must change if they are to get better." This heartening quote from German physicist Georg C Lichtenberg captures the essence of what it takes to make a difference. To improve the world around us, to resolve issues that block the path to a better future, requires individuals willing to take risks and make bold changes. This is the philosophy on which the LV Rogers Secondary school Student Council was founded, and it has made great strides in achieving positive change within the school

Since its inauguration in September of 2021, the council's eighteen members have divided themselves into several smaller groups in order to focus on the school's many important issues.

The idea for the student council originated with Chairperson Sola Vandonselaar. "I was in social justice class when the vice principal came in," she explained, "and there were a lot of changes being made to administration. We asked questions and a lot of them couldn't be answered." Vandonselaar added that there was a "gap between the student body and administration."

She names the lack of communication as a driving force in the council's formation; "Speaking with our school administration made me realize that students didn't really have their voice. I wanted to create a student council so that students wouldn't be in the dark about what was happening in their school, and so their concerns could be heard by a group that could do something about them." The council is gradually becoming an established and recognized group within the school.

Administration's relationship with the students came up frequently during the interview. Co-Chairman Ellie Eagleson clarified that "making sure students trust the admin" is a top priority. If students don't have confidence that their issues are taken into consideration by people who are capable of resolving them, why should they voice their problems at all? Eagleson and Vandonselaar both point to an unwillingness to strive for change within the student body as an ongoing challenge the student council faces in their efforts to improve the school.

Covid-19 has been another massive hurdle for the council to leap. Multiple restrictions on school gatherings prevented in-person

meetings. In response to these restrictions the group relied on Zoom meetings to continue their projects. In recent months, the pandemic has stolen much of the Student Council's momentum. Vandonselaar elaborated on this, adding "It's hard to want to push for change when change isn't able to happen, and I think it's really sad."

The council distributed a survey to the student body which helped outline the schools most pressing issues, and using the results the council conceived a variety of projects. These projects are intended to better the school environment and to improve communications between the administration and student body. Vice-Principal Danielle Klassen adds, "We are so pleased to work with the council members to address many of the topics that students generate in order to better the school as a whole."

A substantial amount of effort has been devoted to making the school a more disability-friendly environment. 12th grade student Bee Cummings states, "In my experience, the staff and students have shown very little care to the disabled people at this school; people frequently stand in front of and block elevators, and the more accessible doors to the school were locked for the first two quarters of the year." There is one entrance in particular that allows easy access to the elevator, however the janitorial staff constantly forgot to leave the door unlocked. This made it quite challenging for students with physical disabilities to get to their classrooms.

**"There was a gap between the student body and administration."**

After a discussion between a team of council members and administration the door is now left open each morning for students to use. The aforementioned obstructions to the elevator was a pressing concern for the student council. After a conference with administration and the janitorial staff, the elevators are now unobstructed.

Another group has set out to install accessibility bars in bathroom stalls around the school. Currently, only a handful of bathroom stalls throughout the building are equipped with the accessibility bars, and it becomes a major issue for students with disabilities

when these specific stalls are occupied. The project is ongoing, as it requires approval from the school's administration as well as a work order. These two projects alone have made great strides in forging a more inclusive and accessible school environment.

According to Co-chairman Sam Kitch, "A student council acts as a mouthpiece for the student body, allowing them to communicate with the administration. In any case, collaboration between students and administrators is key." The council has brought many issues to the administration's attention, ensuring they get the time and effort they need to be resolved. Vice-Principal Klassen comments, "We have greatly appreciated the Student Council's input and concern for many aspects of the school and their advocacy for the student body as a whole."

**"A student council acts as a mouthpiece for the student body."**

In a sign that student-administration relations have improved, the council was entrusted with the Legacy Project. The project is a school improvement plan which aims to renovate and repurpose an outdated space within the building. As mentioned before, the multipurpose room was selected to receive the upgrade. The Legacy Project remains in its early stages, and has only recently entered the planning phase. The council aims to get input from the student body by distributing a survey in order to gain an understanding of what additions to the multipurpose room people would most enjoy. The current blueprint includes more comfortable seating, less intense lighting, soft music, a carpet, as well as plants and other decor. If executed correctly, The Legacy Project will greatly improve the school and have a positive impact on the learning environment for years to come.

After a full school year of operation, the student body is more communicative with administration than ever before. Klassen speaks of the administration's experience working alongside the council, adding "in meeting with the Student Council and listening to their ideas, we are more than happy to play our part as administration to assist the student council in any way that we can."

The council has made great headway in its mission to improve LV Rogers. Even in the

midst of a pandemic, the group has overcome many obstacles to become a recognized entity within the school. It is proof that anyone, regardless of age, is capable of making a difference.

Change is often perceived as something that requires an army, but a single person who has enough motivation and bravery can do more than a room full of people who don't. If there is a problem that needs to be solved, we must not reassure ourselves with the notion that someone else will do it for us. Our education is a vital part of our lives, and it is crucial we do everything in our power to improve our learning environment.

A school is a community which thrives when both teachers and students care for it. A student's voice, though not as influential, carries just as much weight as an adult's. We must ensure that student voices do not go unheard. We must be the change we want to see.

*I have lived in Nelson, BC, for nearly my entire life. I am 17 years old, I love to write and I have a strong interest in film. During the summer I love to mountain bike, and throughout the winter, I ski as much as I can. If I had the chance to speak with my 12 year old self, I'd tell him that great things happen when you do things you're afraid of.*

### New Headwaters Podcast!



Kootenay Mountain Culture's podcast has an episode dedicated to Basin youth in [episode 8](#) - plus, it features a special spotlight on KTN! Meet the youth who are dreaming big and living bigger!

# DISABILITY ADVOCATE ADVISES GOVERNMENT

**Interview by Alexis Folk of Creston, Age 15**

**Article written by Hazel Raine of Creston, Age 14**

*Alexis Folk is a teenage activist with cerebral palsy from Creston, BC, who interviews people and has her own website with podcasts. In June of this year, she interviewed Noor Shaker, a teen from Port Coquitlam who also has cerebral palsy, to discuss accessibility issues and how making a difference, even a small one, is important.*

Though the name and person Noor Shaker may not ring a bell for some people right now, it is sure to become more well-known as she continues to confront challenges towards people with disabilities and the education system.

“Most fairy tales don’t begin with ‘once upon a time.’ They begin ‘if I get elected.’”

Noor is a 14-year-old teenager with cerebral palsy living in Coquitlam, BC, who decided she wanted to make a difference with how people with disabilities live an everyday life. She is a part of the StrongerBC Young Leaders Council, which has given her opportunities to talk to other youths who also want to create a better world for young people living in British Columbia.

Personally, Noor found that even in school, her education was lacking due to underpaid teachers and staff, and it was difficult to find EAs (Educational Assistants) and mobility aids that could assist Noor during her classes. She also contended with an inadequacy of accessibility funding with sidewalks that were too narrow and bumpy for her wheelchair, which she also had to wait three years to re-



**Noor with Fin Donnelly, MLA for Coquitlam-Burke Mountain.**

ceive. “[It’s] been a huge issue for getting equipment and just being able to live in an accessible world,” Noor shared when talking about her cerebral palsy.

When asked what inaccessibility means to Noor, she said that as well as sidewalks in her city being too small and bumpy, the doors in her school require an extra set of hands because they do not open automatically. This, she agreed, was a barrier to her independence.

“It’s not just physical barriers like doors and stuff like that,” Noor added when talking of inaccessibility. There’s also barriers with understaffed and underpaid EAs and aids in her school. “Nobody in the education system is



**Strong BC Young Leaders Council with Premier John Horgan. Photo submitted.**

paid enough. Nobody is supported in the education system,” she said. This lack has spurred her to advocate for K-12 staff and students with disabilities. “How are we supposed to support [students with disabilities] when our educators are burnt out and have little to no support?”

From being in the school system for almost ten years, Noor shared that she has “seen a lot of talk from government officials but no action” with regards to support and funding for people with disabilities. She was frustrated by this inaction - “I wanted to be a part of something [that] makes change happen.”

In May of this year, Noor met with many different BC MLAs such as Brittny Anderson and Fin Donnelly, as well as Premier John Horgan. Near the end of the meeting, she says she was able to meet with the Premier and ask, “Who is responsible for funding for people with disabilities?” Premier Horgan’s answer was, in fact, himself. Noor then asked when he planned on implementing that funding, and if it was possible.

“The answer he gave me was that Ottawa doesn’t give him enough money [for funding], so he has to bug Ottawa for it. But in my opinion, if he’s building a museum that costs us millions of dollars, he can invest some money into accessibility,” Noor said.

Being a part of the StrongerBC Young Leaders Council gives Noor the opportunity to advocate “for change for people with disabilities, and specifically people in the education system, because like I’ve said, our voices are not being heard...” Noor stated that this experience gave her a little bit of hope that the BC Government will start listening to both people in the education system as well as people with disabilities.

When asked what Noor prefers being referred to in her ability status, she said, “It doesn’t really bother me whether you say ‘disabled person’ or ‘person with disabilities’, I don’t really have a preference, but I know other people do. So I would say in most cases you should probably say ‘person with disabilities’... so you don’t offend [someone].”

“Anybody can be a mighty person.”

In the interview for this article, the last question was “What do you think makes a mighty person?” Noor answered, “Anybody could be a mighty person, whether you’re advocating on social media or advocating by protesting - it just takes talk. Like getting involved in your community for change as I emailed my mayor a few weeks ago about getting our sidewalks fixed and making our city more accessible. It doesn’t have to be something as big as getting involved with the provincial government... You just have to be you, and stand up for what you believe in.”

Noor often says “Most fairy tales don’t begin with ‘once upon a time.’ They begin if I get elected.”

*My name is Alexis Folk and I live with Cerebral Palsy in a small town in B.C. I am 15 years old. I enjoy being able to make a difference in people’s lives and making them happier.*

*The goal of starting the Meeting Mighty People Podcast came about because I commonly feel non-disabled people underestimate the abilities of people living with disabilities.*

*I decided that it was important for me to try to change people’s attitudes by trying to educate them about the talents, successes and barriers that people with disabilities have to deal with and embrace. I felt something needed to be done to spread the positive side of everyone with diverse abilities, because you often hear so much about what people with diverse talents struggle with.*

*I feel very passionate about this project and I hope you find my podcast enlightening. To hear my story and some of the stories of the many mighty people that I have interviewed so far, see my [Meeting Mighty People Podcast](#).*



**Interviewer, mighty person and podcast host extraordinaire Alexis Folk. Photo submitted.**

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## WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR 12-YEAR-OLD SELF?

**High School Spotlight: students from the Fernie Secondary School share their responses**



RHEAGAN SHAW, AGE 18

**M**y advice to my twelve-year-old self would be: Be yourself and put yourself first. Holding your breath as you walk the people-pleasing tightrope, constantly on the edge of succumbing to self-doubt, fear of failure and letting others down, and societal pressures is exhausting!!! There are going to be so many times when your hard work goes unnoticed or underappreciated and it is discouraging and frustrating when you give your all, just for nobody to acknowledge and validate your effort. Learning to accept your own hard work and doing things for yourself, not just working to please others, is a huge relief. Accept yourself, all of it: your mistakes, experiences, and all the messy stuff. Because not everyone will. Show yourself the empathy you want to show the world. A lot of people will come and go, don't change yourself for someone. The only person you're with forever is you, so love yourself. Put you first. Accept yourself, and then accept the rest of the universe.

VICTORIA SCARPELLI, AGE 18

**I**f I could give any advice to my 12 year-old-self, it would be to take it easy. I would tell 12 year old me that everything was going to be okay and there's nothing to stress over. I would tell 12 year old me to take better care of myself.

Over the past year I realized that making mental health a priority helps more than one would think. I wish I learned that sooner. Going into the next chapter in my life I am going to keep up with the mentality that you just to have to take it one day at a time and not worry about failure or success because ultimately you will always end up with the same path you were destined for.

I would most importantly tell myself to let myself be more free and happy and to make more good memories to cherish.



## Naturalist's Niche

**Hazel Raine of Creston, Age 14**

**M**any people see dandelions as weeds and only weeds, meant to be sprayed, removed, disposed of. Like that deep-rooted belief, so too is humanity's unwillingness to come towards mutual agreement and connection. Both mindsets are stagnant, still convictions that show our hesitation to stepping out of the ordinary and accepting life in all of its forms – human, animal, plant, earth. I personally like the quote “The difference between a flower and a weed is a judgement.” What can we learn from dandelion, this unassuming but resilient plant?

*“I'm a fourteen-year-old living in Creston, BC. I am currently homeschooled and my hobbies include writing, reading, drawing, photography, keeping my cats from tearing each other apart and exploring coniferous forests. I have a blog in which I write and share my photography: <http://instinctandintuition521175755.wordpress.com/> The advice I would give to my twelve-year-old self would be to embrace life, even when it's scary, and to know that even when fear gets a firm grip in our lives, being brave and courageous means doing something in spite of that. It's okay to be scared. And it's okay to be brave.”*

## Jayda's Epic Graduation

**Reflection by Jayda Greenaway of Nelson, Age 17**

**S**o obviously my grad class's last four years were not the typical highschool experience. And it sucked. Big time.

But unlike the last two years, I was super privileged to celebrate my graduation “normally” with all the people that experienced the same messed up four years with me. I've never been to a graduation ceremony before but I have watched a lot on TV. So I knew that walking across the stage, wearing my cap and gown, and accepting my diploma in front of my peers and family was going to be a huge moment but to be honest that part was all a blur.

The moment that felt most special to me was marching into the gym together. It was the first time I was happy entering the gym. We were led by bagpipes into the gym and over a thousand of our friends, family members and teachers stood and cheered as we strutted our way around the gym. Once we found our places we stood and faced the smiling crowd. I instantly found my crazy crew in that group, losing their minds.

It was an unforgettable moment.

*Jayda is an eighteen year old, born and raised in Nelson. She is a recent high school graduate and is excited to be studying at selkirk college next year forearly childhood education. “I would tell twelve year old Jayda to be open to new experiences. Don't be afraid to try new things!”*



# POETRY CORNER

## O' TIME

O' time is like a bluebird on a roof  
It flies away and sings its song aloud  
And to its passing by thou art aloof  
To listen to its song thou art too proud

O' time is like a mockingbird so high  
Repeating phrasing that thou shall forget  
O' never doth thou listen to its cry  
For thou is far too scared to feel regret

O' time is like a dove from down below  
And cooing at thy feet it reaches close  
And as it pecks away, it's moving slow  
It's letting be the things thou loves the most

O' time is like a bird; it flies away  
So watch the bird while it is still today

*"Bee Cummings is a seventeen year old from Nelson BC. They have plans to become an author, and are going to college in Castlegar BC in September for creative writing. If they could give their twelve year old self any advice, it would be this: Do not spend your time dwelling on your bad memories. Reminisce on the good memories, let those be the ones fresh in your mind."*

# ARTS



## Comic by Landon Dales of Invermere, Age 16

Hi! I'm Landon! I am 16 years old and live in Invermere, BC. I love writing but have found myself doing lots of art for KTN, and I am able to explore my other passions such as photography and reporting. I have three dogs and four cats (I know, it's a lot), and love gardening, painting, and discussing current events such as climate change.

# STREET TALK

## KTN correspondent Ashleigh Germaine of Nelson, age 13, asked two Nelson grads: What does Grad weekend mean to you?

"This weekend for me, it's a chance to celebrate all our hard work we put in to school and all the accomplishments we've made and the obstacles we've overcome and it gives us a chance to really celebrate everything and all the people who have helped us get here especially my mom - she's phenomenal."

~Ella Hurst, age 17



"Basically just a celebration of the rest of our time here and enjoying a weekend with friends and food. In Germany we just walk on stage in dresses like this and we get a certificate and we have a party, but not like the cavalcade, not the walk, not the cap and gown. It's like the grad I never would have had."

~Lisa Zimmermann, age 18, German exchange student

# A STORY FOR OUR TIMES

## Book review by Johanna Brochhagen of Nelson, Age 19 (and Ruby)

It's so not what you think. The Birth House is not so much about a house you give birth in, as it is a story of a woman's journey that led to the house's creation. This book was a captivating story that took my breath away several times.

Dora Rare lives in Scots Bay, Nova Scotia in 1916 and was trained by the village's woman, (she delivers babies and can provide any naturally made remedy for any ailment). The people of Scots Bay live to survive, while the outside world reaches in on their secluded existence: the First World War,

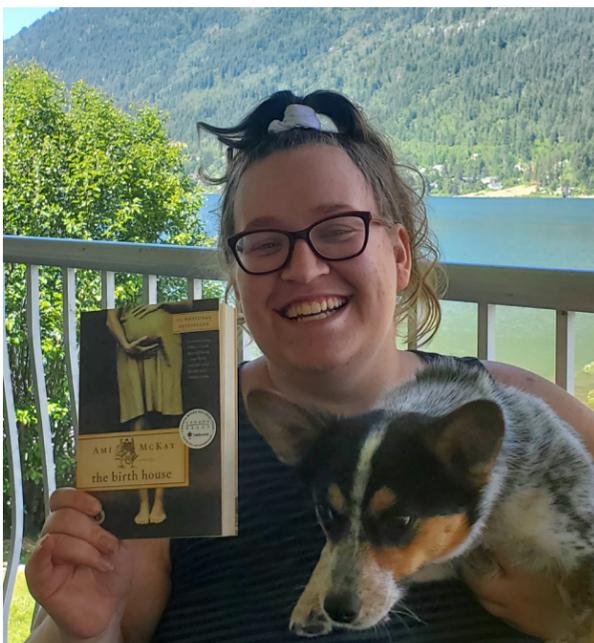
the Halifax Explosion of 1917, the misogynistic doctor inserting himself into what, at the time, was woman's work, and Dora's own abusive marriage.

I related with Dora's struggle as she fought for the women of Scots Bay to have the birth experience they want. The methods may be outdated and inaccurate but the issue of people not having their voices heard by their medical staff is a struggle that many face today. The current situation in the States with politicians trying to control a woman's right to her own body, sadly, makes this book a relevant

read for today.

This book is one I strongly recommend to anyone searching for a Canadian read that deals with finding your place when the world seems to send the message that you are not wanted.

*I live in Nelson, am nineteen. I am interested in pursuing a career in the medical system whether that be with people or animals. My dog Ruby is my inspiration, my everything. The advice I would give to my twelve-year-old self is that life is tough, but you can be truly happy and have a fulfilled life.*



Book reviewers Johanna and Ruby all smiles in recommending The Birth House

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*"I like writing for the paper because it is a teen paper - I feel like teens want to have a voice and have independence, but we aren't very experienced in that yet, so to be able to try and practice having a voice, feels good. It's been empowering."*

~Teen reporter

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